

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SCS-03 SCA-01 PA-01 PRS-01
USIE-00 SS-15 NSC-05 NSCE-00 L-03 H-01 SSO-00
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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8963

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGUI 1524

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC, CT, US

SUBJ: DETENTION OF WESTERN JOURNALISTS

REF: BANGUI 1523

SUMMARY: AS REPORTED REFTEL, EMPEROR BOKASSA RELEASED WASHINGTON POST CORRESPONDENT JONATHAN RANDALL INTO THE CUSTODY OF THE CHARGE JULY 21. AP REPRESENTATIVE MICHAEL GOLDSMITH, WHO IS NOT AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, IS STILL IN CUSTODY. THE CABINET, IMPERIAL COURT AND DIPLOMATIC CORPS LISTENED AS BOKASSA DENIED VEHEMENTLY PORTIONS OF GOLDSMITH'S STORY AND RANDALL'S NOTES, CHARGED RANDALL AND GOLDSMITH WITH BEING SPIES, ACCUSED THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR BOTH THE FEBRUARY 1976 ASSASSINATION PLOT AND THE ALLEGED SLANDERS BY THE JOURNALISTS, CLOSED THE COUNTRY TO AMERICAN TOURISTS, AND SAID HE WAS READY TO ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCE OF RUPTURE OF RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. HOWEVER, BOKASSA SUBSEQUENTLY WITHDREW THE RESTRICTION ON AMERICAN TOURISTS, AGREED THAT RANDALL WAS NOT A SPY AND SAID THAT HE WANTED TO MAINTAIN AND DEVELOP RELATIONS. WHEN THE CHARGE ATTEMPTED TO ARRANGE A PRIVATE MEETING TO DISCUSS GOLDSMITH, CONFIDENTIAL

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BOKASSA AGREED BUT DECLINED TO MEET IMMEDIATELY. END SUMMARY.

2. DENOUEMENT WHICH RESULTED IN RANDALL'S RELEASE TOOK PLACE IN LARGE AUDITORIUM ON THE GROUNDS OF THE IMPERIAL COURT IN BERENGO. ALL MEMBERS OF THE CABINET AND THE IMPERIAL COURT WERE ON THE STAGE, WITH THE HEADS OF DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ORCHESTRA. THE EMPEROR

SAID HE HAD ASKED PEOPLE TO COME BECAUSE OF A SITUATION WHICH HAD ARISEN BETWEEN HIS COUNTRY AND THE UNITED STATES. HE THEN ASKED THE CHARGE TO EXPLAIN WHAT HE KNEW ABOUT THE VISIT OF THE TWO JOURNALISTS.

2. THE CHARGE STATED THAR RANDALL AND GOLDSMITH HAD COVERED THE OAU MEETING IN LIBREVILLE AND HAD ARRIVED IN BANGUI FROM BRAZZA-VILLE JULY 12. THEY HAD MET WITH VARIOUS PEOPLE, INCLUDING IN PARTICULAR THE CAE MINISTER OF INFORMATION. THE CHARGE HAD SEEN THEM ONLY SOCIALLY. CHARGE THEN RECOUNTED WHAT HE KNEW OF GOLDSMITH'S DETENTION (BANGUI 1468), RANDALL'S DISAPPEARANCE (BANGUI 1494), THE EMBASSY'S EFFORTS TO OBTAIN CONSULAR ACCESS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VIENNA CONVENTION AND NORMAL DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE, OUR LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONDITION OF THE TWO JOURNALISTS, AND OUR REQUESTS FOR APPOINTMENTS WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND THE PRIME MINISTER.

3. THE EMPEROR THEN DEMANDED BY WHAT AUTHORITY THE CHARGE COULD REPRESENT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, WITH WHICH THE CAE HAD DIRECT DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS (BUT WITHOUT RESIDENT MISSIONS). THE CHARGE RESPONDED THAT WHILE GOLDSMITH WAS A BRITISH CITIZEN, HE WORKED FOR AN IMPORTANT AMERICAN PRESS AGENCY. THE EMPEROR ANNOUNCED THAT GOLDSMITH WAS NOT A BRITISH CITIZEN, AND HE LATER ADDED THAT HE WAS SOUTH AFRICAN.

4. THE EMPEROR HAD AN ADVISER READ THE LAW OF OCT. 23, 1975
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REQUIRING ALL FOREIGN JOURNALISTS TO REGISTER WITH THE POLICE AND TO PUT DOWN A DEPOSIT OF 100,000 CFA (\$400), OF WHICH 80 PERCENT IS REFUNDABLE ON THEIR DEPARTURE. HE DEMANDED WHETHER THE EMBASSY HAD MADE SURE THE JOURNALISTS FOLLOWED THIS PROCEDURE. THE CHARGE REPLIED THAT AMERICAN JOURNALISTS WERE NOT UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE USG. HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE JOURNALISTS FIRST VISITED THE EMBASSY, BUT THAT HE WAS SURE THAT THEY HAD ANNOUNCED THEIR PROFESSION TO THE IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS AT THE AIRPORT. (RANDALL CONFIRMS THAT HE DID SO.) ALSO, THE CHARGE NOTED THAT THE SIGN CONCERNING THE LAW OF OCT. 23, 1975, WHICH USED TO BE PROMINENTLY DISPLAYED AT THE ROCK HOTEL, HAD DISAPPEARED IN RECENT MONTHS.

5. NEXT ON THE AGENDA WAS THE READING OF THE FULL TEXT OF GOLDSMITH'S ARTICLE (PARIS 20878), FIRST IN ENGLISH THEN IN AN APPARENTLY ACCURATE FRENCH TRANSLATION. THE EMPEROR DENIED VEHEMENTLY WHAT HE MISREAD AS AN IMPLICATION IN THE ARTICLE THAT HE WAS BEING "PAID OFF" BY THE PRESIDENT OF FRANCE. HE SAID HE RECEIVED A PENSION AS DID OTHER FORMER MEMBERS OF THE FRENCH ARMY, AND THE COUNTRY RPT THE COUNTRY RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE AID FROM FRANCE. BUT NO HEAD OF STATE TOOK CASH PAYMENTS FROM ANOTHER HEAD OF STATE. HE ALSO DENIED THAT FORMER PRIME MINISTER MME.

DOMITIEN HAD BEEN PLACED UNDER HOUSE ARREST BECAUSE SHE OPPOSED THE EMPIRE. SHE HAD LEFT THE COUNTRY BECAUSE OF BAD HEALTH AND DURING HER ABSENCE HE HAD RESHUFFLED THE GOVERNMENT. SHE HAD NEVER BEEN UNDER HOUSE ARREST. BOKASSA CONTINUED BY DENOUNCING GOLDSMITH'S STATEMENT THAT THE STADIUM WHERE THE CORONATION WILL TAKE PLACE WAS A "GIFT" FROM YUGOSLAVIA. HE ALSO DENIED THAT THE CORONATION WOULD COST \$20 MILLION AND DESCRIBED AS "UNWORTHY" THE CHARGE THAT PATASSE HAD BARGAINED WITH THE EMPEROR TO OBTAIN THE CONSTITUTION IN RETURN FOR AGREEMENT TO PROCLAMATION OF THE EMPIRE.

6. AT THIS POINT BOKASSA LAUNCHED INTO A RAMBLING HARANGUE AGAINST THE TWO JOURNALISTS AND THE UNITED STATES. THE GOLDSMITH STORY WAS ATTACK AGAINST THE SOVEREIGNTY OF HIS STATE. BOKASSA
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REVIVED THE CHARGE THAT THE FEBRUARY 1976 ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST HIM HAD BEEN "ORDERED AND FINANCED" BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE EMPLOYEE (LOCAL) OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY, CALDO. THAT WAS THE FIRST ATTACK AGAINST HIM AND THE JOURNALISTS WORK WAS THE SECOND. BOKASSA OBSERVED THAT THE US STILL HAD RACIAL PROBLEMS. HE SAID HE SUPPORTED THE BLACKS OF SOUTH AFRICA AND WOULD HELP THEM IF HE COULD. HE WAS READY TO ACCEPT THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGUI 1524

CONSEQUENCES OF A RUPTURE OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES, BUT HE WOULD NOT BE THE FIRST TO TAKE THE DECISION. THE TWO JOURNALISTS WERE SPIES. THE UNITED STATES WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL OF THE TROUBLE WITH AFRICA. FINALLY, BOKASSA ANNOUNCED THAT NO AMERICAN TOURISTS WOULD BE PERMITTED TO VISIT THE CAE.

7. BOKASSA THEN POINTED TO A PILE OF FILES (RANDALL'S AS IT TURNED OUT) WHICH HE SAID CONTAINED DEROGATORY INFORMATION ABOUT NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. HE SAID HE WOULD HAVE THEM PHOTOCOPIED AND DISTRIBUTED TO ALL EMBASSIES IN BANGUI. HE MIGHT SEND DELEGATIONS OUT TO EXPLAIN THEM TO FRIENDLY COUNTRIES. IN THE MEANTIME, HE HAD EXCERPTS READ, MOST OF WHICH CONCERNED CONGO, AND ACCOMPANIED THESE WITH A RUNNING COMMENTARY. (THE EXCERPTS WERE NOT DEROGATORY AS FAR AS WE COULD TELL.)

8. THE CHARGE THEN ASKED FOR THE FLOOR. HE SAID HE HAD NOTED BOKASSA'S STATEMENTS AND WOULD REPORT THEM TO WASHINGTON. HE THANKED BOKASSA FOR THE RELEASE OF RANDALL, WHICH BOKASSA HAD ANNOUNCED IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS HARRANGUE. HE DENIED THAT RANDALL AND GOLDSMITH WERE SPIES AND REITERATED THE DENIAL MADE LAST YEAR BY THE AMBASSADOR (TO WHICH BOKASSA HAD REFERRED) OF USG
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INVOLVEMENT IN THE FEBRUARY 1976 COUP ATTEMPT. THE CHARGE THEN SAID THAT HE BELIEVED HIS GOVERNMENT WISHED TO MAINTAIN BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE CAE AND REFERRED SPECIFICALLY TO AID PROJECTS HELPING THE RURAL POOR AND THE WORK OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN THE COUNTRY.

9. THE EMPEROR REPLIED IN A CONCILIATORY TONE. HE COMPLIMENTED THE CHARGE FOR HIS PRESENTATION AND WITHDREW THE RESTRICTION ON ENTRY OF AMERICAN TOURISTS. AMERICAN NEWSPAPERMEN WOULD STILL BE PROHIBITED, HOWEVER, AND TOURISTS SHOULD BE WARNED NOT TO PLAY THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS. BOKASSA ALSO DECLARED THAT RANDALL WAS NOT A SPY, ALTHOUGH HIS WORK AFFECTED BILATERAL RELATIONS. BOKASSA SAID HE WANTED TO MAINTAIN AND DEVELOP RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES.

10. THE ENTIRE SESSION, WHICH LASTED TWO AND A HALF HOURS WAS RECORDED, AND MOST STATEMENTS WERE EITHER FILMED OR TAPED FOR TELEVISION.

11. RANDALL IS IN GOOD CONDITION AND WAS NEVER BEATEN. HE CONSISTENTLY ASKED TO CONTACT THE EMBASSY WITHOUT RESULT. FULL DETAILS FOLLOW SEPTEL.

12. THE EMPEROR SAID THAT GOLDSMITH WOULD NOT BE RELEASED, ALTHOUGH HE WAS CONFUSED ABOUT WHO HAD WRITTEN WHAT, HE ATTACKED GOLDSMITH FOR BEING A SOUTH AFRICAN AND DID NOT RETRACT HIS

ACCUSATION THAT GOLDSMITH WAS A SPY.

13. THE CHARGE ATTEMPTED ON DEPARTURE TO ARRANGE A PRIVATE MEETING WITH BOKASSA TO DISCUSS GOLDSMITH AND THE BROADER QUESTION OF US-CAE RELATIONS. BOKASSA SAID CERTAINLY BUT DECLINED TO MEET IMMEDIATELY. CHARGE WILL PURSUE THIS JULY 22 WITH MINISTERS AT THE IMPERIAL COURT. BELIEVE THAT ARRIVAL OF BRITISH CONSULAR
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OFFICER, WHICH IS CONFIRMED FOR NIGHT OF JULY 21, WILL HELP.
SMITH

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Message Attributes

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